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Blood Equity (NFL Football Documentary/Walking Shadows DVD)

Picture: C+ Sound: C+
Extras: D Main Program: B

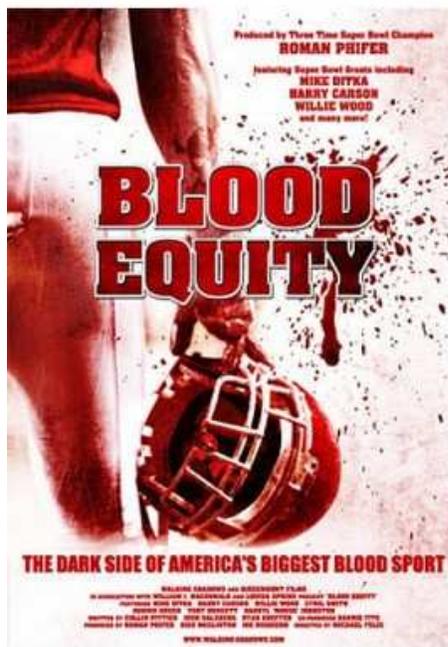
The National Football League is not just another company or franchise, but one that dominates the sport of professional football. They have gone out of their way to do so and with that success comes responsibility, especially if they keep speaking of integrity and honor. This is the same NFL that was found guilty of killing the short-lived rival USFL and had to pay the whopping damages of \$1.00 and the same NFL that claims it is pro-family and pro-player. However, Michael Felix's new documentary **Blood Equity** shows the USFL affair is a drop in the bucket as compared to what they should not be doing now.

Despite having a pension fund that is well-funded by the huge billion-dollar success of their seasons and memorabilia, as well as the impression (is it only myth then?) that they take care of their own, thousands of former players who need their pension money and more (especially medical care for how the game wore them down, especially before innovations to protect current players in the field) are being ignored, shuffled, spun-away and allowed to wither without one bit of NFL support. This program does an excellent job of highlighting how bad this is.

Through interviews of former players, coaches and relatives of those players unjustly left behind, we discover that the NFL and its player's association is ignoring and shutting out the very players who made the franchise the #1 family spectator sport by the 1980s. Though you can see why new fans might not know older players (which is another problem and issue the NFL needs to deal with instead of letting their legacy be disposable) but the NFL itself knows better and the it is embarrassing how badly the players who became sick and ill have been ignored.

Few well-knowns from the recent past had the guts to show up here, but Mike Ditka does and tells it like it is, showing why he is one of the greats who made the NFL possible. Tony Dorsett also had the guts to give an extensive interview among the players here who also include Harry Carson, Willie Wood, Cyril Smith, Donnie Green and Darryl "Moose" Johnson. Roman Phifer produced.

Since the 1980s, the beginning of an all-time ugly period in business in this country where certain political forces decided it was "fine" for big rich



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multi-national corporations to have their pensions go unregulated (among other big mistakes) has the NFL routinely rejecting the work of these earlier players by not giving them the extra medial benefits they are entitled to, especially since these players more than any other the NFL will ever have built the franchise into what it is today.

Most disturbing is the story of Pittsburgh Steeler Mike Webster, who was part of the Iron Curtain that made that team the most successful in the history of the NFL. Taking all kinds of hits, the man played his heart out and when he retired, he especially had difficulties and was not well, including in one respect many of the former players discussed are (or were before their deaths) suffering: brain damage.

The NFL repeatedly rejected legitimate medical evidence to give him his benefits and the result was that he lived his post-NFL years in unbelievable discomfort and when he died, still did not get the recognition he deserved. A highly underreported story, his family took the NFL to court and eventually won a settlement in the millions of dollars due to NFL negligence, but with him dead and no other players in his situation getting some of this justice, it is a dark victory leaving the NFL paying more than they would have had they just given him his money in the first place.

Ditka and the others here lay out excellent arguments against this and so much more n how embarrassing and scandalous this situation is. When the NFL talks about integrity, they talk as if they were running a branch of the U.S. Military, which means they expect honor and respect based on their own conduct that is considered to be (hoped to be by fans) the kind that would not allow what is happening here to happen, but the ugly truth is that the NFL has failed its fans, players and legacy, yet have done little to solve the situation.

Is it greed? It is ignorance? Is it that too many now running the NFL think the idea of the NFL is a joke and it is just another money machine? Especially sad (and rightly noted by Ditka) are the newer stars ignoring this despite the benefits they are getting, all the way to the millionaires still enjoying a great post-NFL life. Most will not be rich and will likely not get any kind of better treatment. Like to many companies, the NFL has yet to dump the pension on taxpayers, but this cannot be a good sign and this from a franchise that has enjoyed the benefits of practically free stadiums in one too many a city who really could not afford it. Yes, taxpayers are already paying for a franchise they get no benefits from.

The NFL is in no danger of erosion yet, despite the rise of X Sports, mixed martial arts and other physical entertainments, but this is something they can only cover up so much until it catches up with them and why play games with people's lives? This extends to the families of the players and the real heart of the NFL, its fans who do not know about this as the story is being censored by big media.

NFL fans and better minds within its power structure need to resolve this as soon as possible, as enough permanent damage has already been done and if not soon, the league may be faced with its own permanent damage that it will find it cannot undo as recent labor disputes in National League Hockey caused a crash there. But most important is the integrity of the game. If not, the NFL will turn out to be a total fraud and yet another American institution will be tainted and scared for life.

The letterboxed 1.78 X 1 image on the soft side throughout with older archive footage being sourced from analog NTSC videotape or even 16mm film, while the newer interviews seem to come from low def digital and/or baldy transferred (early) High Definition video. The Dolby Digital 2.0 sound is sometimes stereo, with some monophonic sound from archive footage. There are no extras.

- Nicholas Sheffo

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